

## Views by Peter Daniel Miller

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### Introduction

What if we let our artistic responses guide our understanding of the world, rather than the other way around? The conventional view makes art out to merely reflect reality -- in a nice or nasty way, or in an approving / disapproving way - but basically derivative. But the truth is that a lot of what we take as solid reality is the

product of imagination. The power of imagination to re-form the world becomes clear when we consider our artistic responses as primary; and laws, regulations, studies, models, and so on as rationalizations of conclusions arrived at viscerally.

Sea turtles have to be saved because they are officially an '*endangered species*', not because they are lovely creatures who deserve to live for their own sake. We pretend that science and law require their survival, as if a study or a regulatory re-classification could justify their extinction. Yet it's that first impression, an essentially artistic response, that animated the human desire to keep them around.

Art exists to realize that response in graphic form, thereby creating and renewing a contemporary sense of reality. Through form and texture, line and shape, color, tone, shading of light and dark, dynamic composition, and other means, images become so memorable that we refer to them when we want to know what a particular slice of life looks like. Everyone has the power to do this. Once the notion of artwork 'capturing' or documenting something is discarded, a whole new world opens up, a world shaped by one's own vision, where novel graphic forms, textures, and tones give new meaning to our surroundings.

That is the premise of these essays written in 2010 to 2021, arranged in thematic rather than chronological order. In my *Views* published on The Kamakura Print Collection website, I sought to turn the conventional perspective around, to look at what we take to be reality through the lens of art. This reveals not only the highly contingent nature of reality, but also the extraordinary wealth of expression provided by ordinary things so seen. By 2015 when *Asia Everywhere* was written, artifacts and thoughtways from Asia had pervaded the West. The essay traces their origins to the dreams and fantasies of 19<sup>th</sup>-century and earlier travelers projected onto the Orient. *Rice* (2019) considers the cultural, religious, and life-sustaining meanings wrapped around this simple grain. An everyday sight to commuters from Kamakura on the Yokosuka Line, Engakuji is also one of the most-visited tourist destinations. I wondered why it memorializes wartime combatants from *both* sides, and that led back to the Mongol invasions of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in *Engakuji and the Winds of War* (2020). Another meditation on war, *Peshawar* (2016), reflects on what turned out to be an unrepeatable Silk Road travel experience. The wartime exploits of fabled photographers and artists are reviewed in *The Art of War* (2012). Even the sincere search for peace can be delusory, as a review of *Kazuo Ishiguro, The Remains of the Day* (2021) reminds us.

The next three essays, like Ishiguro's novel, reflect European perspectives, the first a story of immigration, *Jacques Delacroix' 'I Used to Be French'* (2014), about the three 'great sadnesses' of France and the author's happiness as an abalone fisherman and distinguished Professor of Sociology in Santa Cruz, California. *Saint Francis and Piero della Francesca* (2010) recalls my stay at the monastery, Chiusi La Verna, where Saint Francis lived, and my discovery of the paintings of Piero della Francesca at nearby Sansepolcro and Monterchi, both of whom lived in both the spiritual and everyday material worlds at once. In *Another Venice?* (2010), I ask whether a few of the cities claiming that title really measure up, and in the course of that enquiry discover what is really unique about Venice.

In *Renewal* (2013), I return to Japan for immersion in the hot-spring sands of Ibusuki, Kyushu, a burial that is actually a renewal, inspiring a new-found

connection between earth, sea, and me. From bright daylight to deep shadow, I explore Kyoto's Katsura Rikyu imperial villa through the eyes of Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows* (2014). Heraldic lore inspires a folly in *A Case of Mistaken Identity* (2014) presupposing a passionate interest by party-goers in minutiae of baroque seals and coats-of-arms.

# Asia Everywhere

Peter Daniel Miller

## 1. *The Lure of the Orient*

From the time of Marco Polo's first journey to the Orient, Europeans have been fascinated with Asia — its strange customs, its alluring women, its spices and jewels and colors, its markets where everything could be had for a price, its vast expanse traversed by caravansaries buying or selling silk, its fearsome warriors, the persistence of its pre-Christian animist religions — the list is endless. One could explore Asia for a lifetime, and many have done just that.

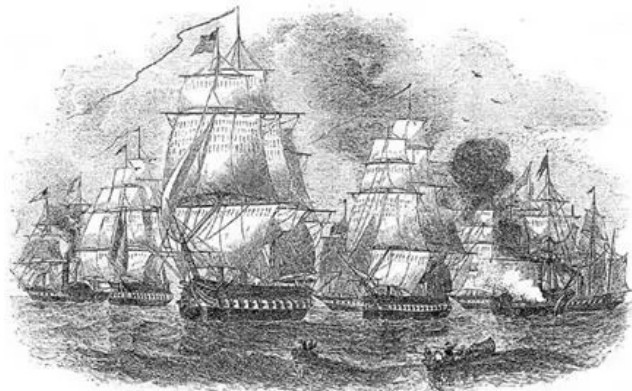


Missionaries were among the first, followed by traders, explorers, and the advance guard of European sovereigns seeking to extend their political domains. The British and Dutch East India Companies sought the riches of the Orient, one of the products of this search being the lure of the exotic. As imperial colonies were established, legions of outcasts found a second home in Asia which over time became their first home. Such were the younger sons of the British elite who became colonial administrators, populating the stories of Maugham and Kipling, with their easy acceptance of Asian ways shocking their metropolitan cousins, who wrote them off as having 'gone native'. The quaintness of the

phrase reveals its irrelevance today.

## 2. *Missionaries in Reverse*

The Victorian / Meiji period (mid- to late-19th century and early 20th-century) saw an influx of Western visitors different from their antecedents. They were, in a way, missionaries in reverse. Soon after the forcible ending of Japan's isolation in 1853, there arrived in Japan a cohort of visitors less interested in bringing Christianity than in seeking enlightenment via Oriental Wisdom. These prominent Bostonians comprised literati (Ernest Fenollosa), archaeologist-collectors (Edward Morse), connoisseur-collectors (Sturgis Bigelow), historians (Henry Adams), artists (John La Farge),





explorers (Percival Lowell), enlightenment-seekers, curiosity-seekers, and afficianados of the exotic (the erstwhile low-life Lafcadio Hearn, who rose from nowhere to become an honored sensei in Japan). Their pioneering role is described in Christopher Benfey's excellent *Great Wave* book. They forged the template for all who later found their way to Japan and Asia. Even before reaching Japan's shores, their fertile imaginations conjured a semi-mythological Japan. The modern Western enchantment with Japan then embellished the Japanese home-grown myths of national identity.

The Bostonians' dissatisfaction with the post-Civil War money-grubbing America of their day supplied the negative image from which their positive notions of the Orient were fashioned. It was no coincidence that New England-style transcendentalism, restraint, and nature-worship were attributed to the Japanese. To these admirable qualities others were added: alluring women, exquisite craftsmanship, disciplined warriors, oracular brevity, charming village life, respect for tradition, and quiet savoir-faire. Upon arrival, the visitors sought out artifacts corresponding to their notions of the Orient, thus launching the lively export trade that grew up to satisfy this demand.

### *3. Japan's Cultivation of its Own Exotic Appeal*

The Mysterious East, especially Japan, was only too happy to oblige, making itself into a major exporter of exotic cultural artifacts, such as Harunobu's *Fidelity*. Once the Japanese learned what was expected, they lost no time in producing it. To the Oriental tendency of providing whatever was sought-after, was added, especially after the 'Black Ships' had arrived in 1853, the necessity of cultivating friendly relations with would-be Western imperialists until Japan might be better able to defend itself. From the mid-19th-century onward, Japan produced a prodigious number of woodblock prints for export. These pictures of courtesans, simple country-folk tilling idyllic golden fields of rice set in green landscapes, rural villages, ghoulish monsters, dragons, animated seascapes, colorful temples and shrines, and



numerous other exotica catered to the Western desire for contact with exotic Japan. The land conjured by these images was neither wholly imaginary nor quite real: Fantasies, like dreams, must have some basis in fact to carry conviction. These woodblock prints poured out of Japan unceasingly, finding their way into

every museum in Europe and America. For many public and private collectors, 'Japanese art' means woodblock prints (like Hokusai's *Fishing*), as if nothing else existed. Ukiyo-e today retain much of their original fascination, as waves of Japonisme sweep over the lands to which they were first exported.

The simplicity and novel perspectives of these charming prints influenced Monet, Cezanne, Whistler, Frank Lloyd Wright, and many others. Where the West was driven by the cult of efficiency and machinery, Japan in their view revered wabi/sabi and the softer virtues. Their favorite sensei, *Okakura Kakuzo*, hit upon the idea of using the Bostonians' love of tea to popularize *cha-no-yu*. It, and he, worked their charms largely on women like Isabella Stewart Gardner (of Museum fame, depicted by Zorn Anders), in whose polite society he cut a broad swath.



The narrative of the Mysterious East survived every disappointment that the facts on the ground could throw at it. The rigors of travel in Meiji Japan, dodging cholera epidemics, typhoons, foul-smelling agricultural fields, noisy bathers at an inn, and excessively elaborate etiquette, tried Henry Adams' patience no end, yet did not discourage his artist-friend John LaFarge from training his eye on charming village scenes (as in *Ueno*).

As Japan's intense drive to modernize gathered momentum, though, even aficionados of traditional Japanese virtues found it hard to direct their gaze exclusively on the past.

Around the turn of the 20th-century, they realized their time was up — they could neither live with nor deny what they saw as Japan's ruin. Yet the narrative survived Japan's industrialization, militarization, and even the deadly conflict of World War

Enami, Love at First Sight

#### 4. The Great Game

As much as tea parties and arranging appealed to those yin virtues, the complementary yang virtues adventure attracted others.

Rough Rider than Teddy Roosevelt practiced Oriental martial arts (spurred on by



II.



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No less a

Sturgis Bigelow). The 'Great Game' in Central Asia attracted those who were anxious to test their mettle against some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet — the barren unexplored Himalayan plateau and mountain passes. Explorers and soldiers-of-fortune dressed in native garb mapped these seemingly impenetrable regions, paving the way for the hardly more regular troops to follow. For a century they fought native tribes and each other for King and Country, or Czar and Country – for this was a contest between Britain and Russia, two empires which the emirs and khans did their best to play off against one another, knowing this was the only way the latter could keep their independence. The great prize of the '*Great Game*' was India, the pearl of the Orient, and the brightest star in Queen Victoria's crown. With every advance of the Czar's forces toward Herat, the Khyber Pass, Gilgit, Chitral, or the unnamed route through the Pamirs, London and Calcutta trembled, yet held the high ground until it was time for India itself to become independent. The '*Great Game*' is still being played out in Central Asia today, under a different guise, with America inheriting the British role, and local tribes still jockeying for position by playing the imperial powers off against each other.

Through the enormously varied cultural interchanges wrought by trade, war, migration, and travel; from sleek consumer electronics and fashion models, to manga, cuisine, and minimalist architecture, Asian influences now permeate the lives of Westerners without their ever leaving home. With the declining salience of antiquarian purity in Asian art, and the inability of contemporary Western models to fill the gap, the 'mysterious East' will likely re-invent itself again, in the hands of those artists and viewers for whom Asian traditions are second nature.

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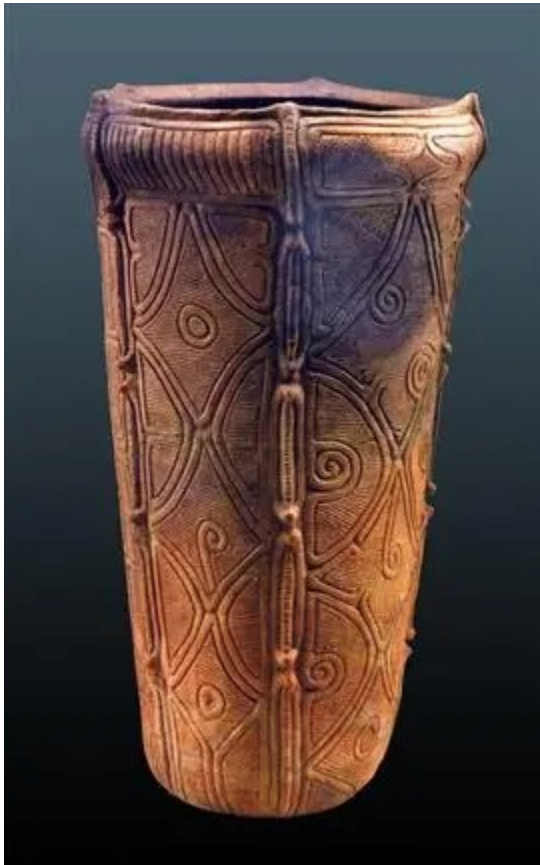


# Rice

Peter Daniel Miller

## 1. Introduction

Nothing conjures up Asia more evocatively than rice-paddies. In flatlands, or mountain-contoured terraces channeling water from one level to the next, wet-rice agriculture feeds more than four billion people, more than any other grain. Asia produces more than 700 million tons of rice per year on 150 million hectares, more than 90 percent of the rice in the world. Rice provides more than one-fifth of the calories consumed by humankind, more than any other agricultural product. Originating in the Yangtze Valley and introduced into Japan in the fourth century BC, wet-rice agriculture transformed the Japanese from the nomadic hunter-gatherers of the Jomon period — which had lasted 15,000 years — into settled villagers and eventually city-dwellers. A glance at a Jomon-era ceramic from 2500 BC will show these were very different people from those who followed.



A grain fundamental to family and clan survival, rice naturally acquired a supernatural aura. From the necessity of cooperating for the labor-intensive tasks of irrigation, planting and harvesting, to the daily experience of the landscape that made life possible, rice set the tone and style of all activities in its domain. Rice-harvest festivals feature dances that are stylized versions of these activities. In every way, rice taps into the deepest wellsprings of human life, materially and spiritually as one.

Japanese legend portrays the sun as Amaterasu the sun-goddess who founded Japan, and the ripening golden grain of rice as her descendant. From that grain arose the legendary first Emperor Jimmu, from whom all subsequent Emperors are said to descend, in an unbroken line of succession that is the longest of any monarchy in the world. The rice-grain itself is thus both deity and nourishment, rejuvenating both body and soul, uniting people, land, and history. Despite or perhaps because of its sacred status, rice has also served as a commodity

and medium of exchange in Japan. During the Tokugawa Era (1603 – 1868), large landholdings of rice-fields in the Kanto region helped Ieyasu Tokugawa consolidate political power as the chief warlord, or Shogun.

## 2. Japan's Self-image



The self-image of Japan, cultivated by the Japanese themselves and taken up by overseas observers, is that of an isolated country lacking natural resources seeking food self-sufficiency as a matter of survival. Yet Japan today is the world's largest consumer of foreign agricultural products, importing \$30 billion of food annually. *'More land in the United States is devoted to growing food and fiber for Japan than is cultivated in Japan itself'*<sup>1</sup>.

Textbooks (and self-image) portray Japan as an agrarian society with a few industries like consumer electronics and cars that have somehow found favor in America and other markets. In fact, Japan is one of the most highly urbanized countries in the world, and an industrial colossus with a diversified economy larger than that of Britain, France, and Italy combined. Even in agrarian communities where people overwhelmingly identify themselves as farmers, as far back as 1840 more than half their income derived from nonagrarian activities. Industry, transport, fishing, wage remittance, and central government expenditures supplied most of their income.



Another perception — and self-perception, as in Ohno Bakufu's *Planting Rice* — is that rice has always been the staple food of Japan, consumed by everyone. But the Japanese people lived as hunter-gatherers for 15,000 years during the Jomon period before taking up wet-rice agriculture. And while rice-growing for subsistence prevailed in its early days, large landholdings coming

under the control of warlords made it hard for rice-growers to keep enough rice from the tax-collectors to consume it. Of what was left, much was sold to buy other grains such as millet. It was only in the Meiji era, late 19th-century, when yields improved, that rice-growers began to have enough rice to eat, as indicated by records of tax collection and peasant rebellions.

After rice became abundant, ordinary folks could easily consume three bowls of it at a sitting, while the affluent chose to have less, making up the nutritional difference with a variety of side dishes. This custom grew into the famous *kaiseki* cuisine which features 20 or 30 different dishes during the course of a meal. NOT having a main course became a mark of culinary distinction. Upscale ryokans still maintain networks of nearby farmers, fishermen, vegetable, condiment, and sake

<sup>1</sup> Reich, Michael R., Yasuo Endo, and C. Peter Timmer 1986 *Agriculture: The Political Economy of Structural Change. In America versus Japan*, Thomas K. McCraw, ed., 151-192, 417-420. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

suppliers. Serving something from all of them acts as both a display of wealth and as a service to guests. The meal is never complete, however, without rice, no matter how little of it is actually consumed. And at the best ryokans and in the best homes, it must be from Tohoku, preferably Yamagata or Akita, now known to produce the highest-quality, tastiest rice with an unmatched luster and consistency.



All the while, rice remained a sacrament and even a deity itself according to legend, by whom soul as well as body are renewed. The evocative power of rice rests in its simultaneous role as collective food and as metaphor for Japanese land. Rice paddies formed the classic Japanese landscape, just as Gothic churches created the French landscape. This multi-layered linkage of body, soul, and land gives rice its enduringly sacred status. Regardless of the actual quantity consumed, domestic Japanese rice remains a sacrament. While the Japanese consumed 88 kilograms of rice per capita per year in 1961, by 2011 it was only 43 kilograms per capita per year. Every grain of this reduced amount remained sacrosanct.

As a food item becomes more of a commodity, where selection is based primarily on price, the less desirable it becomes for those who have discretionary income or wealth. Domestic Japanese rice being more expensive than imported rice thus makes it more, not less desirable — provided there is a qualitative difference. Japanese consumers report in repeated surveys that they prefer the taste, appearance, and texture of domestic rice. Paying seven times the average world price, they have become connoisseur-type buyers rather than commodity-type buyers.



After contentious trade disputes during the 1980s, the Japanese Government, still concerned about westernization, redirected its efforts into a successful campaign to establish 和食 (*washoku*, traditional Japanese cuisine) as an intangible element of World Heritage. In 2013, UNESCO registered *washoku* as an intangible cultural heritage. Lest there be any confusion about the practical consequences of this registration, the Japanese Government issued the

following statement:



*'As lifestyles have been westernized, young Japanese have increasingly tended to move away from washoku, with the result that it is now in a critical state in Japan. Registration of an intangible cultural heritage requires that continued measures be taken to preserve it. We are truly happy', Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at the time, 'as Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio is only 40 percent in terms of calories, with the spread of Western eating habits. We would*

*like to continue passing on Japanese food culture to the generations to come.'*

### *3. Japanese Emperors as Rice-Shamans*

Emperor Naruhito acceded to the Chrysanthemum Throne in Japan on May 1, 2019, following the abdication of his father Emperor Akihito a day earlier. Both ceremonies were low-key, as if seeking to fit the rituals and the monarchy into modern life. Honoring ancestors and contemporary norms, Emperor Naruhito's first speech evoked the blessings of peace, to pacify those who remember his grandfather Emperor Hirohito's wartime role. It was said that Hirohito had 'renounced his divinity', but this misconstrues the Japanese notion of divinity, in which rocks and trees as well as Emperors take part. An Emperor could no more renounce divinity than Mt Fuji could. Japan is inhabited by thousands of *kami-sama* living in rocks, trees, rivers, waterfalls, mountains, Shinto shrines, and wherever nature inspires affection.

The most important of these deities is rice. In legend and history, rice is intimately bound up with the Imperial family, at once a gift of Amaterasu the Sun Goddess, and the progenitor of the legendary first Emperor Jimmu from whom all subsequent Emperors are descended. They all inherit the sacred responsibility of cultivating these seeds, uniting the practical and spiritual duties of leadership. Producing food to sustain life is at once a sacrament and a ritual of daily renewal. The early Emperors were, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney writes in *Rice as Self* (I am grateful to Leanne Martin for recommending this book), rice-shamans, endowed with quasi-magical powers to ensure the peoples' survival. These rituals have continued to the present day Imperial investiture ceremony, which is adapted from ancient folk rice-harvest festivals.

Such rituals were needed not only to invoke the gods of the rice-harvest, but also to mark this rice as distinctively Japanese. As rice-paddies coalesced into large landholdings, wet-rice agriculture formed the foundation of the emerging Yamato state, and of the Emperor/Shogun system. By officiating at rice-planting and rice-harvest ceremonies, Emperors enact the life-renewing properties of rice, and what it means to be Japanese. As Ohnuki-Tierney puts it, *'Humans and their communities must rejuvenate themselves... by performing a ritual, or by eating rice. Through the consumption of rice, the Japanese internalize the divine power which then becomes part of the human body and its growth.... Whether a food*



*represents an individual self, a social group, or a people as a whole, this symbolic process renders foods powerful symbols not only conceptually but also, we might say, at the gut level.'* Here then in 2019, in one of his first official acts, is Emperor Naruhito planting rice, in fulfillment of his ancient rice-shaman responsibility.



The worship of rice as a deity is akin to Shinto practices honoring elements of the natural world. There being no essential difference over the long course of time between animate and inanimate elements, rocks and trees can be worshiped as ancestors in the same way as people. Your great-great-grandfather could be that owl hooting in the trees, and you could turn into a fossil. Shinto, 神道 (the way of the gods) focuses on our relation to nature, as beings whose existence is entirely subsumed by nature. Buddhism is about humankind in society, based on the teachings of individuals who attained great wisdom, like Buddha and his followers, giving practical guidance for relief of suffering. Japanese people worship their ancestors to get along with each other in daily life, to reinforce their sense of Japanese identity, and to be at peace with their natural surroundings.

#### *4. Ancestor-worship Around the World*

Ancestor-worship is not unique to Japan. Ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Magyars, Celts, Hindus, Chinese, African tribes, and many others practiced it. All of them placed food, weapons, clothes, anything the deceased might need, in their tombs. Ancestor-worship wasn't simply blind loyalty. This belief in the persistence of life after death — for otherwise why worship ancestors, if they would not be gratified by it? — survived unscathed for millennia across a wide swath of the globe. Descendants thought of the departed soul as living underground and really in need of sustenance. It was up to them to provide these offerings, in precise accordance with prescribed rituals. If they failed in this worship, bad things would happen. Thus generals who left their soldiers' dead bodies on the field of battle (because of the danger of retrieving them) were legally assassinated even though they won the battle.

Why? Neglected spirits would arise and demand their due. These ghosts would haunt the living until they were properly appeased. Fear, more than filial devotion, kept it going. Few wished to risk the consequences of failing to appease or worship their ancestors. For the ancients, the risks and benefits were personal. You could only be helped or haunted by your own ancestors, not by anyone else's. How much more fateful for a warlord, tribal elder, clan leader, Caesar or Emperor to worship or not worship his ancestors. He could hardly choose not to do so, because the fate of his whole tribe, clan, or nation hung in the balance. All the people in his extended family would suffer defeat in war, awful pestilence, crop failure and starvation, or some other horrible means of extermination if he failed to worship



his ancestors in accordance with exactly prescribed rituals. His position and his very life depended on it.

This arrangement gave great power to the priests who prescribed the rituals. They could in effect de-throne or elevate a king or an Emperor by manipulating the arcane formulae that were their specialty. It didn't take the priesthood long to discover this. Every Imperial Court — in Greece, Rome, India, China, Japan, Indochina, the Vatican, the Holy Roman Empire, Great Britain, you name it — became a hotbed of intrigue among competing ministers and priests. This discord among priesthoods was their undoing. Savvy monarchs learned the art of *divida et impera* (divide and conquer), to turn contending factions against each other, and thus discredit them all. This was the beginning of the end of religious belief in Europe, which incidentally propelled the founding of colonies in the New World, and their eventual independence. De-sacralization and de-mystification left little room for the machinations of priesthood.

Japanese rulers since at least early Tokugawa days adroitly played off the various Western religions against each other, the better to keep their own native Shinto and imported Buddhist practices. Never in its history occupied except for the postwar 1945 – 52 period, Japan kept its own practices sacrosanct by unconsciously incorporating them into daily life. Rituals such as saying *itadakimasu* before meals, though not usually considered religious, acknowledge receiving sustenance as a gift. Ringing bells and clapping to summon the gods is done routinely when visiting Shinto shrines, which are always placed in scenic locales of natural sanctuary. So, while Western religious institutions founded on faith-based belief systems crumbled before the onslaught of reductionist science, the Japanese way of life survived because, except for extreme versions such as occurred between 1930 and 1945, beliefs are subservient to its way of life rather than the other way around.

For millennia the Imperial family had lived in almost total seclusion, a tradition that postwar Emperor Hirohito determined not to pass on to his son Akihito. To accomplish this transformation, he brought in Mrs Elizabeth Vining, a young woman from an old Pennsylvania Quaker family, to teach English to Crown Prince Akihito. Mrs Vining writes of her four years (1946 – 1950) as the young prince's tutor in *Windows for the Crown Prince*<sup>2</sup>. Initially Mrs Vining had little or no idea what she was in for. Asked only to teach English, her responsibilities grew to imparting the freedom of association she had grown up with, mediating among contending factions regarding the prince's education, and (with Imperial permission) briefing General MacArthur on her charge's progress. Amid opposition



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<sup>2</sup> Tuttle, 1950; I am grateful to Dianne Marshall of the Grass Valley (California) Friends Meeting for the gift of this book

from official traditionalists, Mrs Vining insisted on the Crown Prince's having what by her lights was a normal boyhood, with school friends, sports, parties, excursions, and as much freedom as was possible within the confines of the Imperial Palace. Crown Prince Akihito took Mrs Vining's instruction to heart, enjoyed the company of a wide range of people, married a commoner, Michiko, whom he'd met on the tennis court at Karuizawa, and performed his duties as Emperor in a way that won domestic affection and international respect. Their son, and now Emperor, Naruhito, has clearly inherited this new tradition of imperial accessibility, and looks set to extend it during his reign.

Ancestor-worship, trees and rocks and rice as deities, and arcane rituals of Imperial succession strike some critics as atavistic irrational beliefs. But the rituals of daily life don't depend on scientific theory. And the record of supposedly rational models of economy, investment, climate, governance, consumer behavior, etc. against actual consequences is nothing to boast about. That hasn't deterred the algorithm-purveyors from claiming omniscience, which in their case amounts to yet another faith-based belief system rigged from dubious or absurd premises. Perhaps a little humility in the face of the unknowable would be more realistic.



*Our Gift*, photogravure etching, Peter Daniel Miller (2014) Copyright 2024 Peter Daniel Miller.

# Engakuji and the Winds of War

Peter Daniel Miller

## 1. Engakuji

Engakuji, in Kita-Kamakura, unusually among war memorials, honors the fallen of both sides, the vanquished along with the victors, extinguishing rights and wrongs, grievances and triumphs, injuries received and inflicted. The entire temple of Engakuji was dedicated by Regent Hojo Tokimune in 1282 to the memory of the Mongols who had recently invaded Japan, and of the Japanese defenders. I once asked where is the memorial monument, and was told by a gate attendant that it is the entire temple. Engakuji is one of the Five Great Temples of Kamakura, consisting of 28 buildings. The exquisite gardens and ponds were designed by Muso Kokushi, who also designed Zuisenji and Saihoji.



The *Shariden* is the oldest building in Engakuji, and the oldest building of Sung-Dynasty architectural style in Japan. It was built in the 15th century after its 13th-century predecessor burned down. It is the only building in Kamakura designated as a National Treasure.

## 2. Nichiren

From all accounts including his own, Nichiren was a charismatic curmudgeon who insisted on the exclusive rightness of his cause. His cause was the Lotus Sutra, a back-to-basics Buddhism that became increasingly popular in the 13th century in opposition to the Esoteric sects favored and supported by the government of the day, the Hojo regime. In 1260 he submitted a treatise to the Hojo Regent entitled 'Pacifying the State by Establishing Orthodoxy', namely the Lotus Sutra. Not surprisingly, the Regent rejected it; Nichiren took his message to the streets of the capital, Kamakura, preaching it to whomever would listen. Quite a few people listened, delighted to learn they could dispense with esoteric sects and Government decrees. Hojo Tokiyori, who had initiated a series of persecutions of Nichiren, died in 1263. The next Regent, Hojo Tokimune, continued them. Nichiren's popularity only grew. By 1271, Tokimune had had enough; he sentenced Nichiren to be beheaded at the execution grounds of a place later known as [Ryukoji](#), where a graceful five-story pagoda in honor of Nichiren now stands. At the appointed time, as Nichiren awaited his fate, a lightning bolt smashed the executioner's sword to bits. As it happened, Hojo Tokimune reconsidered his execution order even before receiving word of heaven's message, and commuted the sentence to exile on remote Sado Island. Nichiren's health prospered there, but a series of earthquakes, plagues, and severe typhoons swept through Japan in the ensuing years. Soon Nichiren was back to Kamakura preaching on street corners

— adding that if the Hojo Government failed to change its ways, further disasters including foreign invasions would follow.

The prophecies in Nichiren's treatise were based on astrological conjunctions similar to those that happened to coincide with prior disasters. An earthquake 'of *unprecedented magnitude*', he writes, occurred in 1257 when Jupiter was near the fourth sign in the Chinese zodiac. Typhoons, famines, and epidemics raged through Japan during the next three years. He then ventured to predict that *'these are omens indicating that this country of ours will be destroyed by a foreign nation.'*

### *3. The Mongol Invasions*

Descendants of Ghengis Khan had amassed an empire ranging from Korea to Hungary. Kublai Khan, a grandson, was busy subduing China's Sung

Dynasty. Nichiren may have put two and two together and figured Japan would be next on Kublai's wish-list. Six years later, in 1266, Kublai Khan invited Japan to be a vassal state of his empire. His envoys were sent back with no response. The offer or threat was repeated in 1269 and 1271. Impatient of the lack of response, in 1274 Kublai and his Mongol warriors attacked two offshore islands, killing all the defenders, then advanced to Kyushu. Despite their initial success, a Yuan general was severely injured, and their inexperienced seafarers became concerned about an approaching storm, and withdrew with the intention of retreating. But as they did so, a typhoon destroyed many of their boats, the remainder returning across the storm-tossed ocean to Korea. Nearly half the invading force perished.







The Mongols persisted, sending five envoys to Kamakura in 1275. Hojo Tokumine had them all beheaded, at the execution site with a view of Enoshima. Five more Yuan emissaries got only as far as Hakata (present-day Fukuoka) where they landed in 1279, before being dispatched in the same way. Kublai Khan, having finally defeated the Sung Dynasty, in 1280 began assembling a much larger force, using Chinese and Korean shipyards to build a large fleet. By May 1281 all was in readiness. Two fleets, one from China, the other from Korea, crossed the Sea of Japan, and after several naval battles approached Kyushu. There as a violent typhoon approached, they sought shelter in Imari Bay. The typhoon smashed their boats to splinters, leaving tens of thousands clinging to pieces of driftwood, to drown or be slaughtered by the Japanese defenders. Between one-third and one-half of the Korean and Chinese invaders did not return. Again the 'divine wind', depicted in Kikuchi Yoosai's *Mongol Invasion*, worked its magic. The Mongols never invaded Japan again.

Hojo Tokimune did not celebrate Japan's victory. Instead he dedicated Engakuji the following year, 1282, to the repose of all the tens of thousands who had lost their lives, with no distinction between invaders and defenders, Japanese and Mongols. Nichiren died that same year, and Hojo Tokumine followed his old adversary in death in 1284.

#### 4. A *Shakuhachi* Concert

Some years ago I attended an outdoor *shakuhachi* concert. The *shakuhachi* is a bamboo flute with a warm mellow tone, with great variation of timbre depending on the force and direction breathed into it. Midway through one piece, a gust of wind scattered the pages of sheet music into the air. Gathering them up, the *shakuhachi* player, somewhat flustered, said 'I guess the wind is angry'. As it happened, a former Defense Minister was in the audience. He observed 'No, the wind is jealous'. What a perfectly gracious remark, praising the performance and setting the *shakuhachi* player at ease. In what other country, I wondered, would a Defense Minister be capable of such sensibility. But then I realized the role of the 'Divine Wind' in Japanese history must be familiar to someone charged with defense of the realm. The *shakuhachi* concert continued without further interruption.

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# Peshawar

Peter Daniel Miller

## *1. A Passage to Pakistan*

One day in 1998 with friends in Washington DC, a call came in. 'Would you like to go on a Silk Road trip', to Pakistan, Hunza, Gilgit, Xinjiang China, Kyrgyzstan, Almaty Kazakhstan? It took me about two seconds to decide yes. Ten of us — seven Americans, one each Canadian, Filipina, and French — met up in Pakistan for the journey northward. Islamabad with its vast avenues of Saudi-financed buildings was government territory. Neighboring Rawalpindi with its incredibly lively street life was its market-appendage. Amid the rubble-strewn sidewalks and buildings leaning at odd angles, the hustle and bustle of daily life radiated irrepressible energy. To experience this enthusiasm is to understand the overwhelmingly young demographics of Pakistan.

We stopped in Mingaora, a village on our way north. There I noticed an old man sitting on a pile of bricks. He seemed to be passing the time of day, thinking. In fact, he was guarding the bricks. In a country where cow dung is rationed for use either as fertilizer or construction material, bricks are a scarce resource valuable enough to steal if no one is looking. Somewhere in the back-country around there, a goat-herd played the flute. Our guide explained after the serenade that this was a payable event, which we didn't mind much, the music was lovely.

The gateway to the Swat Valley was marked with vast jacaranda trees filling the sky, flowering with a luxuriant perfume that could have inspired the Shangri-la of Asian mystique. The fertile and prosperous valley teemed with the life of a people peacefully tilling the fields and living in harmony with the world around them.

In the more arid foothills approaching Peshawar, we noticed a long line of trekkers on a far-off rocky trail. They were so far away they looked like a procession of ants. Binoculars revealed them to be people carrying refrigerators, ovens, and electronic goods strapped to their backs. These goods had been smuggled into the port of Karachi and were carried by human mules for sale in the remote back-country. Though electricity was scarce there, one road had power lines that stopped abruptly at a huge compound. Alone in the dry rocky landscape stood this oasis of greenery and electricity. It was, we learned, the home of the 'King of the Smugglers', the employer of the trekkers we had seen earlier. The wealth of the country belonged to him and to people like him who controlled whatever commerce was allowed to exist.

## *2. 'Why Are You Here?'*

Peshawar, near the legendary Khyber Pass, was defended in ancient times as it is now by fierce tribes anxious to keep intruders out of their sovereign territory. No invader, from Alexander the Great to the British and Russian players in the 19th-century 'Great Game' to the latter-day Americans, has ever been able to impose its rule on this region. In cities and villages like Peshawar, I walk around early, right after sunup, to watch vendors setting up their street-stands, children going to



Tea • 茶 • 20 x 13 cm photogravure etching, Peter Miller (1999)  
The Kamakura Print Collection • [kamprint.com](http://kamprint.com) & [kamprint.com/xpress/](http://kamprint.com/xpress/)

school, office workers, teachers, women shopping. There were no other tourists besides me. The unmistakable look on everyone's face wordlessly expressed: *'Why are you here?'* It was not an unfriendly inquiry, merely one of curiosity, similar to my own curiosity. I found that if I stayed still for ten minutes, I blended into the background and could frame some spontaneous scenes in the camera without being noticed.

For some, the question *'Why would you want to come to this hellhole?'* appeared in the form of incredulous stares. Did my presence mock their aspiration to get the hell out of there? A few took the opportunity to practice the English they had learned at school, leading to lively and mutually interested conversations. Our entire group was invited to an Afghan wedding, a warm celebration that extended well into the night. The couple and their families and friends were among the three million Afghan refugees living in and around Peshawar.

An expedition to the Afghan border above Jalalabad took us to a town populated, so far as was visible on the street, entirely by Kalashnikov-carrying teen-age boys. Women were not to be seen anywhere except a very few in the dark interiors of shops. Even in the 40 (C)-degree heat, they wore head-to-toe black robes, which must have been stiflingly hot. In several shops open for business, you could buy a Kalashnikov for about \$14.

The mountain roads zigzagged across numerous stream beds toward Hunza. The roads and bridges had all been built by the Chinese. These transportation routes would be of use to both the Chinese and Pakistani armies in case of military



Hunza Terraces, 27 x 18 cm photogravure etching, Peter Miller (1999)  
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conflict with India. The Chinese, as is their custom, had placed lion-sculptures for good luck at both ends of the bridges. Local people had systematically lopped off all the lion-faces, as graphic depiction of animals or humans was incompatible with their beliefs. With such fervent beliefs, why didn't they build their own bridges? They could have chosen motifs from their own rich graphic tradition more to their liking.

Hunza was a lovely mountain outpost with terraced rice-fields, views of mountains in every direction, and rough-hewn architecture of a style with echoes of Tibet and Mongolia. The surrounding area was a hotbed of 19th-century



'Great Game' intrigue as local tribes played the British, Russians, and Chinese off against each other to maintain their own jealously guarded control. Feats of incredible fortitude were played out in these unexplored and practically impenetrable mountains. I was determined to come back and explore further.

Our entry into China was guarded by young soldiers recruited from far-off coastal regions to enhance the Han-Chinese presence in Xinjiang, with its 20 million Uighurs. Noting the variety of nationalities in our group, the passport-control officer asked suspiciously 'Why are you traveling together?' This was so totally outside his limited experience that the question seemed perfectly natural to him. None of us knew what to say, so we asked him to stamp the passports and get on with it.

The road to Kashgar was lined with graceful poplars, as all cities of any consequence in central Asia are. Kashgar was then a wild-West town with a chaotic market in all kinds of livestock including women. Kidnapping of girls to sell as brides was not uncommon. The price might be as high as 20 camels or more, and camels were more valuable than Chevrolets in the trackless wastes of the neighboring Taklamakan Desert. 'Taklamakan' means 'You go in, you don't come out'. Kashgar had a thriving Uighur community, largely self-governing and not subservient to the Chinese authorities. The Uighurs lived in cave-like structures honeycombed throughout one large district of Kashgar. Since then, I have read that the Chinese government bulldozed these out of existence to make way for 'urban renewal' that no one wanted. Kashgar then was a polyglot mix of Uighur, central-Asian, and Chinese nationalities, ethnicities, and eccentricities, all of whom appeared to be co-existing peacefully. Each had its own particular foods, colorful textiles, and other products, in which a lively trade occurred in the central market.



Kashgar House, 16 x 20 cm photogravure etching, Peter Miller (2000)  
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### *3. The Orient-Occident Frontier*

The crossing into Kyrgyzstan was like flipping a switch from Orient to Occident. Suddenly the houses looked European, picket fences sprang up around yards, Western foods appeared in the markets. Peter the Great had seen to it long ago that the furthest outposts of the Russian Empire had a European feeling to them. Forested mountains and abundantly flowing streams made it clear why Kyrgyzstan is called the Switzerland of central Asia. At one stopping-point, a Kyrgyz tribesman allowed me to wear his tribal hat and ride his horse. I was hooked — I wanted to join the tribe, or at least come back for a longer experience of the country than possible with this brief journey.

Almaty, then the graceful capital of Kazakhstan, lived up to its old name of Alma-Ata, 'Old Apple', with its broad tree-lined avenues and abundant markets. Wandering into a Russian-Orthodox cathedral, the purest, clearest a-capella



singing I have ever heard kept us entranced for an hour or more. As Almaty was the last stop on this trip, a visit to the market scored a kilo of fresh caviar, which, wrapped in old newspaper, made a much-appreciated present to friends in Geneva only a few hours away by air.

#### *4. No Going Back*

Back home in Japan, I mapped out several excursions to the Central and South Asian areas I wanted to see more of. A vast territory, it would need several trips, some by car, others with more foot- or camel-trekking. It took me a couple of years to get various obligations out of the way before I could schedule the proper amount of time. The arrival of the new millennium proved epochal in unexpected ways. The much-publicized Y2K problem turned out to be a non-event, but the pervasive anxiety around it foreshadowed in a skewed way a more ominous turn of events. Like the panic induced by the 1938 'War of the Worlds' broadcast, portents of widespread system failures caused by a computer glitch reflected seemingly unrelated real-world conflict.

In March 2001, people motivated by religious sentiments similar to those that caused the lion-faces on Chinese-built bridges to be lopped off, blew up the monumental Buddhas at Bamiyan. This required considerable ingenuity in setting up the explosive charges to reduce the entire monument magnificently carved into the mountain to rubble. The bombing was universally condemned, but the general consensus was that no action need be taken because the bombers had 'only' attacked a sculpture without killing people. Perhaps they would stop there.

Later that year, as the summertime of long days and lazy heat was slowly winding down, my thoughts again turned to how to go about the Central Asian quest. I decided to eliminate the things I disliked — long hours cooped-up in vehicles without a stop, long-winded guides discoursing on history I would soon forget, shopping, and not enough free time to walk around and spontaneously enjoy the surroundings. September is always a time of renewal, of new plans, of quickening activity as the yearend is in sight; a harvest-time, a time for giving thanks for the bounty of nature, a time for reckoning-up gains and losses, making budgets which carry with them our forecasts, really our hopes and dreams, for the year to come. Shaking off the summer torpor, the pulse quickens, the vigor of autumn animated by the end of the sense of endlessness, the feeling that now is the time to start whatever we hope to do — before it's too late.

The television was absent-mindedly on one morning, even though nobody was watching it. I saw in passing what looked like a movie, a burning building, people running in panic, firemen running toward the smoke. Smoke and dust obscured the ground-level view, which seemed strange — the movie director should have waited until the smoke cleared. The handheld cameras were unsteady, they kept shifting from the narrow streets to a vaguely familiar-looking bridge, to the view from across a wide river, to an aerial view from a traffic-monitoring helicopter. The TV picture shifted to the Pentagon, part of which seemed to have caved-in. What did that contribute to the story? The sequence was chaotic, it made no sense. Finally an announcer made it horrifyingly clear this was no movie. A passenger airliner had flown into the World Trade Center in New York. How could that happen on a clear day?

Suddenly the flaming building collapsed in on itself. In seconds, office workers, secretaries standing at Xerox machines, executives in their corner offices, messengers delivering urgent messages, were incinerated in the skies above New York and reduced to smoke-filled rubble. The building instantly became the tomb of thousands. Before I could take in the enormity of this mass death, another airplane flew directly into the other tower. This was no accident. That building too collapsed in on itself soon after. As the broadcasters began to piece together the gruesome details — the attack on the Pentagon, the planned attack on the White House foiled by courageous passengers who downed the plane in southwestern Pennsylvania, the demented religious zealots who had carried out the attacks — the president of the United States urged Americans to go shopping. (His advisers feared an economic meltdown, and that was the best they could think of to prevent it.)

Together with the 3,000-plus lives snuffed out on that day and the destruction of symbolic commercial buildings, the sense of a shared destiny in the world was also shattered. The divisions exploited by warlords and politicians were already there, of course, but this wanton act of mass murder deepened them immeasurably. Since then, self-appointed spokesmen for 'the world' or 'the international community' have proliferated; their hollow calls for ever-more foreign aid could neither comprehend nor mask the fact that that world of shared destiny had been obliterated.

I realized my Central Asian idyll was over before it could start. For a long while to come, that spontaneous camaraderie that is the essence of international travel would give way to mutual suspicion and fear. Large swaths of the world would become war zones or no-go zones. Visitors would be advised to practice 'situational awareness', a heightened threat sense always on the lookout for possible attackers.

Afghanistan, the home of Ghandaran art that mingled Roman, Indian, and Central Asian motifs, would become even more of a war zone than it had been in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, when I caught only a dusty glimpse of it from the border town outside Peshawar. The verdant Swat Valley of Pakistan had already been taken over by one of the competing death cults spawned by a twisted religious faith, the same one that had harbored the absentee leader of the attacks on New York and Washington. And the newly independent Central Asian nations became staging areas for endless wars or bloody war zones themselves.

In my travels I never sought to intervene unasked in other people's lives, never entertained the delusion that I could 'make a difference' one way or another. Giovanni di Lampedusa's observations about the Sicilians apply equally to other unwilling aid recipients:

*'The Cardinal of Palermo was a truly holy man; and even now after he has been dead a long time and his charity and his faith are still remembered. While he was alive, though, things were different; he was not a Sicilian, he was not even a southerner or a Roman; and many years before he had tried to leaven with nordic activity the inert and heavy dough the island's spiritual life in general and the clergy's in particular. Flanked by two or three secretaries from his own parts he had deluded himself, those first years, that he could remove abuses and clear the*

*soil of its more flagrant stumbling-blocks. But soon he had to realise that he was, as it were, firing into cotton-wool; the little hole made at the moment was covered after a few seconds by thousands of tiny fibres and all remained as before, the only additions being cost of power, ridicule at useless effort and deterioration of material. Like everyone who in those days wanted to change anything in the Sicilian character he soon acquired the reputation of being a fool (which in the circumstances was exact) and had to content himself with doing good works, which only diminished his popularity still further if they involved those benefited in making the slightest effort themselves, such as, for instance, visiting the archepiscopal palace.'*

Aid organizations and NGOs have proliferated since those days. Their self-congratulatory reports full of fanciful stories of the (temporary) conquest of this or that disease, or construction of isolated buildings destined to fall apart, above all perpetuate themselves and their lavish fund-raising parties and gabfests, their stratospheric executive salaries, and their rampant corruption, while transferring wealth from the poor of rich countries to the rich of poor countries.

The artifacts and monuments of ancient civilizations bear powerful witness to their endurance. When savage zealots destroy them, the goal of their rage is to eradicate all memory, to start over. The same desire, to impose mass amnesia, produces mass murder and genocide. There is therefore some survival value to humanity in remembering its past glory in all its various cultural manifestations. When these artifacts are converted into icons of wealth, though, then their civilizing influence is lost. Such is the modern antiquities trade, which has become a criminal enterprise rivaling in its size the drugs and weapons trade. The monetization of antiquities and their physical destruction are actually two sides of the same coin. Both attack the sense of shared destiny that sustains cultural memory and civilization, seeking to impose amnesia so that their own twisted cult can gain ascendancy. We cannot restore the pre-2001 world. Perhaps with wit and imagination, though, we can transport ourselves through deep time and across vast distances into the world that created the antiquities we venerate, and to experience that world and the current world anew.

# The Art of War

Peter Daniel Miller

## 1. Robert Capa and Gerda Taro

As the forces of a cataclysmic world conflict gathered in Spain in 1936, two young photographers, Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, responded to the besieged republican government's call to arms. Fascist forces had bombed Guernica, the first aerial bombardment of civilians in history. Picasso's monumental *Guernica* depicted the agony.

The Spanish poet Garcia-Lorca was murdered by fascist rebels in the early days of the war. The Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939) called forth an international gathering of artists and writers unparalleled in modern times. Soon-to-be-famous luminaries including George Orwell, André Malraux, Ernest Hemingway, W H Auden, Stephen Spender, as well as Stalin's future spies Kim Philby and Anthony Blunt arrived along with legions of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and other volunteers.



In the laconic prose of reportage, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* related the heroism and the atrocity of war, the character of Pilar modeled on the real-life *La Passionaria* in David Seymour's memorable photo. Robert Capa's photographs



documented the face of war, even unto the moment of death of a Loyalist soldier shot by a sniper. Capa was always there, in the thick of the action, the original heroic war photographer.

He covered five wars, the camera his only weapon. Born Endre Erno Friedmann in 1913, he fled his native Hungary in 1931, finding refuge in Paris. There, on photo-assignment for a Swiss life insurance company, he met Gerta Pohorylle, a German Jewish refugee who was teaching photography. Thus began one of the most storied romances of the 20th century.

Two Jews on the run, exiled from their homelands, struggling to survive in the



chaos of 1930s Europe, they were truly star-crossed lovers. In a brilliant stroke of both marketing and survival, they concealed their Jewish identities and merged themselves and their photographic work into one name: Robert Capa. She re-invented herself as Gerda Taro, the first name an adaptation of screen star Greta Garbo's, the second from Taro Okamoto, a Japanese artist then studying anthropology and the occult at the Sorbonne. She used a square-format Rollei, while his camera was the rectangular-format Leica. Together they found that the same photos sold under the American-sounding name 'Capa' fetched three times the price paid with the name 'Friedmann'.

With the call to arms in 1936, they made their way to Barcelona and the Spanish front, embracing their heroic destiny as graphic reporters of republican courage and fascist atrocities. Capa/Taro were fearless and lucky, living on the sheer adrenaline of risk-taking, somehow always getting the shot without getting shot. Gerda Taro kept her own identity, refused Capa's offer of marriage, and later in 1936 started selling photos to European publications under her own name. They continued working together as comrades-in-arms, and kept company with others. Tragically after only a year, her luck ran out in a 'friendly-fire' collision of a tank with a car where she was perched on the running-board. She was only 26. She was accorded a martyr's funeral in Paris by the French communist party, with tens of thousands of mourners in attendance.

But there's more to the story. Gerda Taro's negatives, taken on the day of her death and for several days before, disappeared completely. The war was not going well for the republican forces, which by 1937 were controlled by the Soviet Union. Any documentation of their defeat, or of the murders of deserters ordered by Stalin's commanders in Spain, would have been most unwelcome. Robin Stummer, writing in the *New Statesman*, suggests that Gerda Taro's death was no accident, that she was a targeted victim of Stalin's henchmen. Future West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who was also in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, believed Gerda Taro was already on Stalin's hit list for her affiliation with the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, and warned her against staying on in Spain in 1937. Experiences such as these took much of the blush off the communist rose.

## *2. Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and the Romance of War*



A continent away in Mexico, the intertwined arts of love and war wove a similar political strand in the relationship of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Rivera's communist views did not prevent him and may even have helped him secure commissions from none other than the arch-capitalist John D Rockefeller. The diminutive Kahlo, like Taro, was eclipsed by her more famous partner, who cast a very large shadow, as can be seen in this 1930s video: Kahlo and Trotsky enjoyed a brief affair, after which Trotsky was

murdered with an icepick by another of Stalin's agents.



The ultimate role model of wartime romance is that of Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) and Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) in 'Casablanca', with Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) as the odd man out.



Recognizing that *'the troubles of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world'*, Rick's sacrifice of Ilsa's love, so that Laszlo could carry on with his leadership of the Resistance, is an act of the most excruciating heroism. After WWII, Robert Capa and Ingrid Bergman in real life became lovers for a year, another pair of exiles seeking solace.

The Capa/Taro photos themselves, pried apart from the photographers' legends, retain their shocking immediacy even as the scenes depicted have since become commonplace. There are photos of wounded soldiers in hideously contorted positions being carried on stretchers, of the sprawled-out dead, of funerals, of battle-plan conferences, of tanks, trucks, the amphibious landings on D-day, anxious refugees in Haifa.

Through five wars, the war-photo genre changed little, only the venues of the carnage moved — to China, Israel, and finally to Indochina, where Capa's own luck ran out in 1954 when he stepped on a land mine. Gerda Taro's street-ensembles, reflecting her lively engagement with her subjects, are more convincing than her battlefield scenes. Had she lived longer, she might have brought her intensity and fine personal touch to the arts of peace.

The genre of war-photography moved on, in unsavory directions in some cases. Made-for-TV scenes became all the rage in the Mideast, Iraq, and elsewhere as the 'new journalism' obliterated the boundary between editorializing and reporting. The Capa/Taro photos remind us of a time of seeming moral certainty and just causes. Their exposure to war sharpened their senses, forcing concentration on the moment, knowing that death can come at any time — tragically soon for Gerda Taro. In the brief 17 years remaining to Capa, he became a consummate practitioner of strategic positioning and precise timing. These skills, learned at the front, became the defining legacy of the [Magnum](#) photo agency which Capa co-founded, along with Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Seymour, Elliott Erwitt, and others.

The Capa/Taro photos are archived at the [International Center for Photography](#) in New York, thanks to the fortuitous discovery of many of his negatives in a suitcase in Mexico. Many of the photos may be viewed here along with the fascinating story of the [Mexican suitcase](#).

## Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*

Peter Daniel Miller

Lord Darlington, an amiable aristocrat of impeccable honour and goodwill, convenes secret meetings at his palatial estate, Darlington Hall. The task of his butler and the narrator of this novel, Stevens, is to see that the elaborate preparations and support services are rendered smoothly and so discreetly as to be hardly noticeable. Lord Darlington's mission in life is to use his wealth and connections to deliver peace to Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. He feels sorry that Germany was treated so poorly at Versailles, and wishes to make amends, trusting that German leaders will return his generous goodwill in kind. Cluelessly and tragically, the noble goodwill of Lord Darlington — a fictional character who represents a type prevalent in England then — is exploited by Hitler to neutralize England before attacking it. Unable to imagine that not all statesmen are gentlemen, the hapless Lord Darlington unwittingly becomes a mortal danger to the country he loves and reveres.

The amateur diplomacy at Darlington Hall is only a subplot of the story, which takes place as a series of increasingly melancholy reminiscences by Stevens. The tragic denouement of his employer's noble efforts has Stevens wondering whether his own service as butler was of any value at all. This is especially disturbing because of the scrupulous attention paid earlier in the story to the high professional standards he aspired to. Ishiguro invents an entire society of English butlers who meet regularly to discuss the niceties of their profession, compare notes on who is at the top of his form and who is not, and publish guides on what constitutes professional butlering. Such is Ishiguro's genius that the absurdity of such preoccupations is subdued and subsumed in Stevens' reminiscences.

Stevens' dedication to his profession is so thorough that his fervently anticipated reunion with his colleague in past service, Miss Kenton, is cast entirely in terms of shoring up the staff at Darlington Hall. Their mutually unrequited relationship is one of the most tragic love stories in literature, brilliantly enacted by Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson in the film. By way of apology for an attempt on his professionally imperturbable demeanour, she says '*Mr Stevens, you musn't take anything I said earlier to heart. I was simply being foolish.*' '*I have not taken anything you have said to heart, Miss Kenton*', he responds, completely unaware of how smitten she is with him. So it goes, right through to the remains of the day at one of those sad seaside resorts that dot the southwest English coast. There, a chance acquaintance advises Stevens '*you've got to keep looking forward; the evening's the best part of the day*'. So he resolves to practice 'bantering', jocular conversation more in keeping with the style of his new employer, an American who acquired Darlington Hall after the war.

For some thirty years after the war, philosophers, historians, and ordinary people pondered how in the world the English aristocracy and many highly educated people could have got it so wrong about Hitler. After all, he didn't conceal his plans, and his murderous activities were perfectly consistent with them. The leading lights of English society somehow contrived to convince themselves that what they were seeing was not what they were seeing. '*The Remains of the Day*' is,

among many other things, a story of self-deception — Lord Darlington's blindness to the consequences of his noble goodwill, Mr Stevens' inexpressible love for Miss Kenton. Their quandry is revealed by half-overheard conversations, interrupted reflections, chance recollections of seemingly insignificant incidents vividly lodged in memory, small gestures, and momentary losses of equanimity.

The novel reminds us we are all mysteries to ourselves. Even as we present seemingly convincing rationales for our behavior to the world at large, we are really no better able to explain our own motivations than those of our families and best friends; and even less can we explain the motivations of complete strangers. Perhaps universal misunderstanding is our fate. We can, however, obtain partial, temporary, contingent knowledge, which is usually enough to get us through the day. In most situations, incomplete knowledge is all we have, whether we admit it or not, and it's on that faulty basis that we must act. Art is no better than science at forecasting the future, but through art we perceive there are things we cannot perceive — hints, intimations, feelings, the very qualities scrupulously removed from Stevens' extremely well-disciplined professional practice.

On rare occasions something inexplicable washes over him, as when Miss Kenton leans in close to pry away the book he has been reading in his precious time alone. She is surprised to find it's a sentimental romance, but Stevens hastens to explain he's reading it for professional reasons, so that he can follow the conversation of the younger guests at Darlington Hall. Later, when given leave by his employer to explore the country west of Oxfordshire, he chances upon a view of the rolling hills near Salisbury that sends him into a most uncharacteristic reverie:

*'It was a fine feeling indeed to be standing up there like that, with the sound of summer all around one and a light breeze on one's face. And I believe it was then, looking on that view, that I began for the first time to adopt a frame of mind appropriate for the journey before me. For it was then that I felt the first healthy flush of anticipation for the many interesting experiences I know these days ahead hold in store for me.'*

In his room at an inn, Stevens recalls the view, which inspires in him a soliloquy on the splendours of the English landscape:

*'I find what really remains with me from this first day's travel... is that marvelous view encountered this morning of the rolling English countryside. Now I am quite prepared to believe that other countries can offer more obviously spectacular scenery. Indeed, I have seen in encyclopedias and the National Geographic Magazine breathtaking photographs of sights from various corners of the globe; magnificent canyons and waterfalls, raggedly beautiful mountains. It has never, of course, been my privilege to have seen such things at first hand, but I will nevertheless hazard this with some confidence: the English landscape at its finest — such as I saw it this morning — possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. It is, I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term 'greatness'. For it is true, when I stood on that high ledge this morning and viewed the land before me, I distinctly felt that rare, yet unmistakable feeling — the feeling that one is in the presence of greatness. We call*



*this land of ours **Great** Britain, and there may those who believe this a somewhat immodest practice. Yet I would venture that the landscape of our country alone would justify the use of this lofty adjective.*

*Meditating on this, he asks 'And yet what precisely is this 'greatness'? Just where, or in what, does it lie? I am quite aware it would take a far wiser head than mine to answer such a question, but if I were forced to hazard a guess, I would say that it is the very \*lack\* of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. It is as though the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. In comparison, the sorts of sights offered in such places as Africa and America, though undoubtedly very exciting, would, I am sure, strike the objective viewer as inferior on account of their unseemly demonstrativeness.'*



These momentary exhilarations hint at a world beyond that of ordinary perception. Through Stevens' observations, Ishiguro leads us from the confusion of unexpected human intimacy, to the joyous wonders of nature, to reflections on unconscious beauty. Stevens himself, though but dimly aware of the limitations of his own perspective, recognizes in these moments there is more to life than butlering. Absurdly, he strives to remedy these deficiencies by diligent study, rather than by direct experience.

The philosopher Roger Scruton relates these momentary epiphanies to Kant's notion of the transcendental, his attempt to see what if anything lies beyond our perception. The world has a meaning which is greater than what is revealed through to our ordinary scientific inquiries, but it is revealed directly in an everyday way to all of us, if only we would keep our attention ready for it.

*'He said we can transcend our point of view insofar as we can see just how limited it is. But we can't get beyond those limits. Yet, as he also said, we have intimations of things beyond the limits, intimations of the transcendental in the moral life. For example we know with absolute certainty of necessity that we are free, we know that by the laws of reason that we must treat each other in such a way as to obey a law that all of us could accept. This is a categorical imperative which binds us regardless of any empirical circumstances. That is something we know, a priori. We don't know how it is that we know it but it brings with it an intimation of a world beyond the one on which the eyes are opened. Likewise in aesthetic experience, the experience of art and the beauty of nature especially, we seem to be granted intimations of a world beyond, of a transcendental realm about which we can't actually speak, but nevertheless of which we can have a certain kind of knowledge.'*

So, at the end of the day, it is these hints, intimations, daydreams that we must

explore to discover the truth of our lives. We explore them through novels like Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, graphic artworks, music, all of which can serve as transcendental media outlining the scope of what remains.



## Jacques Delacroix' *'I Used to Be French'*

Peter Daniel Miller

### 1. *An Unlikely Refugee*

Of all the immigrants who washed up on America's shores, few could be happier than Jacques Delacroix, who confesses in his autobiography *I Used to Be French* this love-letter to America. And in what does his happiness consist? The love of a good woman, the proximity of the sea at Santa Cruz, California, with free-diving and fishing, a respected though not exalted occupation as Professor of Sociology, and freedom from — from what, exactly? French women, French cuisine, French wine, French savoir-faire, French culture — what's not to like? Here is the mystery of emigration. By the age of twenty-one, he had tasted all of these in great abundance during summers in Brittany.

Previous refugees from the Metropol had discovered their wild sides in Brittany: Gauguin and his cohorts lived by the Cote Sauvage before decamping to Tahiti and its dusky-skinned beauties (a preference the author shares). The flowering and near-deflowering of Delacroix' youth occurred in that wild-West of France, where he discovered the many joys of rural life. There too he discovered the most constant love of his life, the sea, becoming an expert diver, swimmer, and sailor. And while the local Bretons specialized in either fishing or farming, young Delacroix did both, helping out with the arduous work of threshing, and not so incidentally finding more amorous opportunities. Largely unsupervised in his leisure hours, he and his confreres earned the reputation that he later characterized as the elders' opinion of teenagers — as animals endowed with human intelligence devoted full-time to mischief. What glorious summers those were!

For answers as to why a young man might wish to emigrate, we must turn to History, which in France is neither remote nor distant. While Americans tend to regard anything before they were born as irrelevant, Biography and History are intertwined throughout Europe, but nowhere more intimately than in France. Delacroix, conceived in Nazi-occupied France, though in one counter-intuitive episode delivered to safety by a German soldier, his own life and that of the nation are bound together even more intimately than most. And so France, he writes, was gripped by three '*great sadnesses*' as he was growing up.

The first '*great sadness*' is the loss and disablement of millions of young men in World War I. This decimation of an entire generation left a gap that Delacroix experienced as an unspoken but ever-present mourning. No family in France was untouched by this loss, every child grew up with the memory of some relative who wasn't there anymore. The young women who survived were deprived of all the intimate pleasures of domestic life that they and their families expected them to have. Not all reconciled themselves to permanent widowhood. Though the shortage of young males dimmed their remarriage prospects, they made do somehow. In one of the most astonishingly frank discussions imaginable between grandmother and grandson, Delacroix asks his grandmother how she managed, and she tells him! The fact is that the scarcity of young males made sharing them

an acceptable custom, and the French reputation for casual adultery is revealed as a demographic by-product.

The second '*great sadness*' in Delacroix' telling resulted from the first — France surrendered so quickly to Nazi Germany at the outset of World War II that there must have been high-level collaboration. Despite the courageous role of the Resistance, Vichy compromised the soul of France, and continues to do so to this day, Delacroix asserts. *Both De Gaulle's nationalist followers and their Communist allies, each for their own reasons, preferred a make-believe reconciliation with the collaborators. In consequence, oppressive, silent evil was all around and inside French society. One prominent politician and gross World War Two criminal was unmasked, tried and convicted only in the 1990s, 45 years late, a lifetime late.* This failure to come to terms with France's collaboration, the vast silence that still surrounds the topic, cast a pall over all of French society.

The third '*great sadness*' is the Catholic Church's then-monopoly over public and private morality. Although Church morality rarely restrained our hero's adventures with the opposite sex — and may have, like any restraint, enhanced them — it did interfere with a fateful life-choice. And from this experience Delacroix derives what is probably sound demographic advice: Let young people marry and procreate as early as they like (and from the evidence of this book, they like it a lot). Knowing as a sociologist that the number of children born to a woman is pretty much determined by her age at marriage, he calculates that if half of all French women were married only two years earlier than they do, France would regain its replacement birth rate of 2.1 children per couple. The demographic gap from World War I would soon be filled. If demography is destiny, the suffering from France's century-old losses has been passed down from generation to generation like a malevolent heirloom. A simple rise in fertility would go a long way toward restoring the French nation.

Rarely has sociology served literature so well as in *I Used to Be French*. Anthropology has often informed literature, notably in Saul Bellow's greatest novel *Henderson the Rain King*, but anthropology has the advantage of the exotic. Philosophy, law, and other learned disciplines have served as points of departure for other writings, but until now, sociology has not appeared to offer much to the literary imagination. Yet here, the characteristically French inter-weaving of Biography and History takes the reader on a Grand Tour of comparative national cultures, inter-generational transmission of customs, and family dynamics.

## *2. Talking Back*

Delacroix gets an extraordinary amount of ethnographic mileage out of his growing-up experiences. Early on, he describes how he often got into trouble at school for 'talking back' (*répondre*), or worse, for creating a 'bad spirit' (*faire du mauvais esprit*), which meant, as he defines it, talking back in a way that suggested error on the teacher's part. He was also often cited for 'singularizing himself' (*faire du genre*). Who knew the French language was so replete with terms for suppressing individuality? Just as Eskimos have numerous words for snow, the French, it seems, revel in words designed to put young independent thinkers in the wrong. Even on the way to and from school, our hero follows a wayward path, *le chemin des écoliers*, always an indirect path with diversions



emanating from his own *esprit*. This book itself is an example of the style of thought that came naturally to him in childhood, exploring whatever digressions the matter at hand suggests. The reader, in my view, is better off for this, as the past or future context of every story is fully elucidated. Much has become clear to the author in hindsight that he had little awareness of at the time; this gradual awakening of self-consciousness, this *éducation sentimentale* in Flaubert's phrase, is an integral part of the story of *I Used to be French*. The very things that got him into trouble at school became over time a guiding light for his later professional career, and a source of pride. He writes *I wouldn't mind if they wrote on my tombstone: 'Il répondait; il faisait du genre; il avançait par détours.*

Our hero's tour of duty in the French Navy thus inspires sociological inquiry: How could a person harboring such strong (not to say rabid) resistance to authority find a welcome home in a military organization? For one very important thing, the Navy fed him well (this is France, after all). For another, it made use of his English linguistic skills, in one instance saving the Captain from what would otherwise have been an embarrassing (or worse) misunderstanding of NATO instructions. It enabled him to visit ports all around the Mediterranean, this at a time when individual travel was prohibitively expensive. The Navy also proved to be surprisingly accommodating to enterprise and initiative. Delacroix chalks up his Navy experience as a persuasive argument for hierarchical, formal, rule-bound organizations, in spite of his general distaste for bureaucracy.

There's more: From personal experience in the French Navy and then later in the ranks of academia, he understands that all organizations need unimaginative management. And he understands himself well enough to see that managing unruly people like himself is really a thankless task. As Delacroix puts it, *The basic problem is this: People who have a good time doing well whatever they are doing rarely desire the headaches that go with management positions. Who in the world would want to manage the likes of me, I ask myself? You would pretty much have to be a little stupid or neurotically engaged with the exercise of power for its own sake. Perhaps it's both. So, within formal organizations, the not-so-great inexorably rise. Thus, in our world of organizations, competent, intelligent, sane individuals chronically find themselves bossed around by the professionally less competent. Voila! — the essence of bureaucracy unveiled.*

Wisely, Delacroix chooses not to bore the reader with the petty disputes endemic in academia. Feminism he dismisses as *a fraudulent cabal of upper-class women masquerading as a people's movement [that] has accomplished little beyond making bad grammar obligatory*. People who cultivate anti-Americanism and Francophilia, which often go hand in hand, exhibit execrable taste: *If you placed small turds on their plates decorated with parsley and splashed with guaranteed organic raspberry vinegar, and called them 'escarmerdes,' they would profess them delicious and exquisitely refined*. The title of this autobiography is more a reflection of the distaste the author feels for such people than a completely accurate statement of his nationality. In America one can be American without giving up one's birth-nationality; though trading on one's original nationality for political or personal advantage is another despicable practice that he wants no part of. Much of Delacroix' professional career in sociology was devoted to documenting that leadership and management play almost no part in organizational performance; this, together with a disinclination to suffer fools

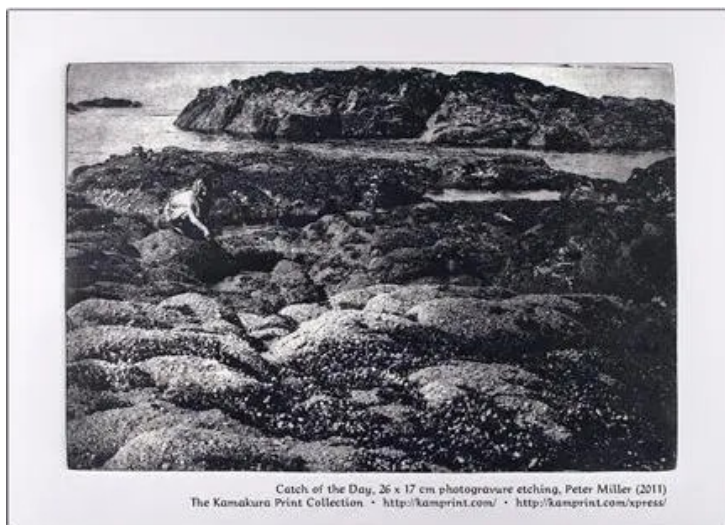
gladly, complicated professional relationships in the business school where he taught for 20 years. How did our hero survive 20 years in the politically-correct jungle of academia?

### 3. A Deep Dive

The answer, in a word, is diving. That, and all it symbolized, together with a life on the idyllic California coast that expanded the summers of Brittany to three-quarters of the year. The abalone-gathering and fish-spearing skills honed in Brittany found welcome application in California. It is not only physical prowess that he celebrates, though he is not shy in this book about mentioning that. Underwater, matching wits with a fish or an abalone takes an entirely different sort of thinking than that prevalent in academia. Though Delacroix does not go so far as to say so, I suspect he would not credit his fellow-academics with intelligence superior to that of fish. But he has bigger fish to fry:

*I claim that diving transformed me because it summoned forth a part of my mind that would in all likelihood have remained dormant without it. When you are 25 feet underwater (a modest depth), holding your breath while trying to spear a fish with a rubber-band gun, neither brawn nor brain matters much. The reality is that the slowest fish can out-swim you and it's hellishly hard to think like a fish. Instead, instinct, or perhaps, intuition, must take over. Accordingly, thousands of hours of diving taught me to temper with intuition the skeptical rationalism that is my first inclination. That I cannot explain how, much less prove how, does not cancel out the fact that I speared that fast fish, located that single, hidden lobster, I tell myself.*

Even more than the fact that no one else in his milieu had remotely similar skills or experiences, the exercise of instinctual, visceral, intuitive understanding gives tremendous satisfaction. If this book inspires readers to recall and develop their own visceral experiences, it will have served both a pleasurable and useful purpose indeed.



The enormously rich and varied culture of France has somehow produced a literature of astonishingly frank confession in unlikely co-existence with a literature of dogmatic rationalism. So it is with Delacroix' *I Used to Be French*. How France produced both a Rousseau and a Voltaire, or, to take another unlikely pair, both a Flaubert and a Descartes, I cannot even guess. My only regret on Delacroix' behalf — though it is not one that he shares, I hasten to add — is that

he seems to have gone overboard on the rationalism. I say this because I believe the quest for self-understanding is unattainable, though there is some benefit in

making the effort. He writes: *While recognizing the useful part of intuition in my pursuits, in the end, I am glad I grew up a narrow rationalist: On a small number of indelible occasions, I was so strikingly lucky in my underwater quest for edible preys that I was at risk of becoming a fetish-worshiper. Ultimately, I might have persuaded myself that I was descended from some giant grouper, from some legendary spiny lobster, or even from some brainless abalone, and that the totemic ancestor was looking after me, personally!* If the sources of human behavior, our likes and dislikes, our loves and hates, our 'no-matter-what' efforts, are beyond rational comprehension, then rational explanation will only take us some part of the way toward enlightenment. Where rationalism is most useful, as French history itself shows, is in restraining the excesses of religious or revolutionary zeal. As an end-in-itself, rationalism is not enough. Delacroix' account of his life aspires at times to a sort of ethnography that is ultimately less than a full account, because it reposes too much faith in rational exposition. In an autobiography, of course one is obliged to present as honest a self-portrait as possible; fabrication would be out-of-bounds. I would only suggest that there is more to any life-story than can be encompassed in rational understanding.

Delacroix' emigration story nevertheless provides an emotionally satisfying and realistic account of an extraordinary journey. *'Brittany stamped itself into my mind, he writes, and into my heart early and deeply. It represented most of the part of life where good things happened regularly and frequently rather than occasionally. It was a topography of the heart. In California I was able to make a decent and pleasant living near the sea... and it's spring and summer for nine or ten months in a row — that's compared to the rainy or foggy non-summer months in Brittany. Only in hindsight does the move seem so well-calculated to please: I cannot brag that careful planning presided over this satisfactory transplantation of several thousand miles, across significant cultural hedges. Mostly, I just followed a powerful instinct reinforced by much intuition and by only a little knowledge, a little discernment. You might say that le chemin des écoliers took me here. The compromise is not perfect. For all its celebrated beauty, the coast of central California where I live (it includes Big Sur) is not as satisfying aesthetically to me as the Brittany shore. It does not offer the human scale of Brittany nor the subtle inter-penetration of sea and human settlements made of granite and slate. And there are few harbors here, one every fifty or one hundred miles or more. There is no chance to sail to the next small town harbor for a lunch of raw oysters as you can do all over Brittany.*



Scenes like this would have been common in his grandparents' day, and are probably not far from the memories of long-time residents of Brittany.

The world's immigration flows include stories of far more extreme duress than this, from the Irish potato famine to people fleeing current-day wars, to boatloads of people risking death at sea to leave their countries of origin. Many will wander the earth for years or decades, a semi-permanent diaspora, others will wind up in temporary settlements dependent on unwilling hosts or charities. A few lucky ones will wash up on America's shores, there to discover as Delacroix did that *'you take what you have and make the best of it'*. Not a bad fate, all in all.

*I Used to Be French* is available from [Amazon](#). The print edition is available from the author at [iusedtobefrench@gmail.com](mailto:iusedtobefrench@gmail.com).



## Saint Francis and Piero della Francesca

Peter Daniel Miller

### 1. *Saint Francis at La Verna*

For Saint Francis and his followers, the landscapes of Tuscany and Umbria recalled the Holy Land. At Assisi, the arid clear air that collapses distance was as congenial to visionary thought as in the desert and mountains of Sinai. But Saint Francis returned most often to La Verna, a mountain north of Arezzo, where fantastic, apparently gravity-defying rocks and mists in the trees atop Monte Penna, lent an other-worldly atmosphere. Saint Francis' sympathy with all living beings and his gospel of the simple life, though articulated early in his ministry, received



further sustenance here. In 1213, Count Orlando Cattani, impressed with Saint Francis' philosophy, donated the mountain to him and his followers, describing it as suitable for contemplation and prayer. On the mountain, the Franciscans lived a simple life in harmony with nature. Giovanni Bellini's painting *Saint Francis in the Desert* (1480), depicts a scene near the end of his days, where in 1224 Saint Francis is believed to have received the stigmata of Christ, which in the eyes of the faithful confirmed his sainthood. Saint Francis stands barefoot, as on holy ground, with hands outstretched amid a landscape full of symbolism. The quivering tree at upper left, mysteriously illuminated, recalls the burning bush of Moses, whom the Franciscans regarded as a spiritual ancestor. Water trickling from a spout in the rocks at lower left also recalls Moses' miraculously bringing forth water from the rocks at Horeb.

Saint Francis did not 'renounce the world', nor did he ever become ordained as a priest. He re-defined happiness as something to be experienced in this world, not to be indefinitely postponed until the next, finding it in the simple life around him in nature, in the spiritual vitality of all creatures — even the birds found his ministry enchanting. He taught suppression of desire as the road to happiness, knowing that, beyond the essentials of life, it is not the lack of things, but the mindless grasping for them, that causes suffering.

Far from Chiusi La Verna but similar in spirit, around the same time, Zen philosophers were discovering in the conscious suppression of desire, reverence for nature and for all creatures, and the cultivation of simplicity a route to

happiness. This is not to suggest that Saint Francis was channeling Zen, only that experience and contemplation in vastly different traditions led to remarkably similar ways of life.

The present-day Santuario La Verna has electricity but no TV, and no heat until Oct 15. It was unusually cold in early October, down to 5 C., but in keeping with the spirit of the place, I didn't complain, and actually got used to it. But then a 'miracle' occurred: The authorities decreed an early start to the room-heating season. Guests are few during the week, more on the weekends. At an investiture ceremony for new priests, the church was full, with people standing in the aisles. I was so



accustomed to seeing dark deserted churches that this semi-chaotic scene of families gathered, babies crying, old friends meeting, and the combination of solemnity and joy suddenly seemed the way it was meant to be experienced. The paintings, the finely carved confessional chambers, the candles and everything all 'fell into place' amid this throng of celebrants.

The Franciscans retain their devotion to the simple life, unsentimental and practical, doing what they can by example rather than by admonition. They don't provide much guidance as to procedure at the convent, leaving each to find his own way. The bells, which have a clear, long-lasting tone, remind you of meal-times and other events. (Hear the bells of Chiesa La Verna.) Meals in the refectory are plain but adequate, with home-made pasta, vegetables, soup, meat (fish on Fridays), bread, and table wine. Well-marked hiking trails in the area lead to Mount Penna and to nearby villages.

Santuario La Verna  
santuariolaverna@gmail.com  
Tel: 0575-5341

## *2. Piero della Francesca: Painting, Perspective, and Accounting*

In nearby Sansepolcro, Monterchi, and Arezzo, the frescoes of Piero della Francesca (1412 - 1492) express religious devotion together with an uncanny presence in this world. His saints are vulnerable human beings, beset by fear and anxiety. They don't look like cherubs or sages. He depicted a pregnant Madonna, the *Madonna del*





*Parto*, using blue pigment made from lapis lazuli imported by a Venetian merchant from Afghanistan. The fresco is in Monterchi, where Piero's own mother was born.

His magisterial *Legend of the True Cross* brings a complex multi-century story to life through a series of realistic incidents. Throughout this narrative, his figures have a 'wooden', almost Byzantine quality, as if exposed in a 'decisive moment' in mid-motion. Yet they are also very much alive, with a variety of human expression, engaged in a direct way with the viewer. Their equilibrium and their activity are in perfect balance. Each painting is an instant of time, for all time.

Most remarkable of all is Piero's 1460 painting of Jesus Christ's *Resurrection*. Given the challenge of depicting a miracle, Piero does so without resort to pyrotechnics, showing Christ rising from his coffin, as if from sleep, above four slumbering Roman soldiers. Behind, at left, the trees are barren, while at right, they are flourishing. The painting is thus divided with mathematical precision, itself symbolizing a renaissance in its composition and perspective. Christ's figure is one of prodigious strength, his expression stunned at this unexpected renewal of life, yet soldiering on, flag in hand. Robed, unusually, in pink, symbolizing the dawn of a new era, he appears determined to carry on right where he left off when interrupted.



In addition to painting, Piero della Francesca also published treatises on geometry, the five platonic solids, perspective, and mathematics, one of which formed the basis for modern accounting! Although another native son of Sansepolcro, Luca Pacioli (1446 – 1517), is generally credited as the 'father of accounting', Pacioli actually learned it from Piero della Francesca, who developed the mathematics of double-entry bookkeeping based on the practices of Venetian merchants with which he was familiar. Truly a Renaissance man, from whom [Leonardo da Vinci](#) later drew inspiration and guidance, Piero della Francesca clearly exemplifies the art-inspired view of life that is the focus of this blog.

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[Luca Pacioli](#)

## Another Venice ?

Peter Daniel Miller

### *1. Marriage of Sea and Land*

The Doges of Venice, upon their inauguration, performed a ceremony of marrying the sea, symbolizing extension of their dominion to all the elements. And in few places are land and sea so intimately entwined as in Venice. The Grand Canal and its tributary canals are all arms of the sea, making the voyages of Venetian merchants and adventurers to the Levant and to Byzantium seem no more than local expeditions. From the top of San Giorgio, where the dragon-slaying saint surveys the Lagoon and the passing ships, the dense network of canals and streets invites exploration.



On closer inspection, Venice is harder to fathom. On San Marco, or in the maze of streets, on the Ca' d'Oro or in the Church of Santa Maria de la Salute, there seems to be a reassuring solidity. Yet Venice's magnificent palazzi are built on pilings that are constantly sinking into the sea. Sea-level surfaces are sometimes underwater, and back-entrances are surprisingly slummy-looking. Viewed from out on the open water, Venice is revealed as a few islands barely above sea level, sparkling and floating, the whole city and all its treasure a mirage.

### *2. San Marco as a Robber's Den*

Venetian architecture, as many have noted, lacks refinement. San Marco is a hodge-podge of precious materials looted from around the Mediterranean. Outside, as Mary McCarthy wrote in her indispensable book *Venice Observed*, it '*looks like an Oriental pavilion — half pleasure-house, half war-tent, belonging to some great satrap.*' Many of its details are whimsical and intriguing, such as the childrens' jacks, and the rain-washed multi-colored marbles look like an abstract painting.



Within, she writes,

*'Inside, glittering with jewels and gold, faced with precious Eastern marbles, Jasper and alabaster, porphyry and verd-antique, sustained by Byzantine columns in the same materials, of varying sizes and epochs, scarcely a pair alike, this dark cruciform cave has the look of a robber's den.'*

How true. In this marvelous *mélange* of sacred and profane, the spoils of war are transformed into objects of worship. The Venetian Republic pioneered and brought to perfection the mercantile blend of commerce, diplomacy, and war. Holy Wars such as the Fourth Crusade were primarily a business opportunity, which the Venetians exploited with an ecumenical indifference to religious belief. The spoils accumulated by the Venetian merchant marine had to be made respectable, and were thus converted into a glittering fantasy of wealth. The monstrous reception room with the gilded painting on the ceiling, intended perhaps to intimidate visitors, is part of the overall effect. The brilliant marbles and elaborate Byzantine facades, reflected in the shimmering waters, said: 'There's always more where that came from'.



There wasn't, of course. Venice's mercantile empire eventually crumbled, due to the increasing vulnerability of the Silk Road to attacks enroute to the Orient, the Ottoman takeover of Constantinople, and finally the Suez Canal which bypassed the old trade routes. Later the Dutch and British East India Companies adopted the Venetian mercantile formula and extended it to the New World.

### *3. A Stage-set for Make-believe*

Venetian architecture is designed to display opulence rather than good form; the facade is all that matters, rear views are not to be seen by anyone whom the owner



wishes to impress. Whistler, though, found the charm in these neglected precincts. Venice is a great stage-set, a place for the rich and wanabe-rich to savor an aristocratic life-style, a city of make-believe, an eternal carnival; a place to be transported in a gondola while the gondolier sings 'Volare'; to sip cappuccino with as much nonchalance as one can muster, or a drink at Florian on the Piazza, dine on *Seppe alla Veneziana* (squid in its own ink) at a restaurant on the Zattere, surreptitiously consult a map, watch recent arrivals struggle with heavy suitcases up and down gracefully arched bridges (because it's the servants' day off), and purchase the candy-colored Murano glass, or a mask to disguise one's identity. In a strange reversal of reality and reflection, it seems as if the canals exist not only for transport, but to confirm the city's existence, as if the shimmering watery depths contained the real Venice. Mary McCarthy observes of this curious double-world:

*'The perennial wonder of Venice is to peer at herself in her canals and find that she exists — incredible as it seems. It is the same reassurance that a looking-glass offers us: the guarantee that we are real. In Canaletto and Guardi, the Venetian image is affirmed and documented: the masks and the bobbing gondolas, the Rialto Bridge, the Dogana, and the blue curtain of the Salute blowing in a freshened breeze.'*

One of Venice's attractions is that the practice of pleasure in all its various forms seems to be its main industry. This was not always so (it used to be only a sideline). It takes an effort of imagination to recall that Venice was once the center of a commercial empire, its palazzi doubling as warehouses. Venetian merchants invented double-entry bookkeeping, the foundation of modern accounting, not usually considered a sybaritic pursuit. (They never bothered to codify their accounting — that was done by two visitors from Sansepolcro, the artist Piero della Francesca who obtained Oriental pigments from Venetian merchants, and Luca Pacioli.) The decline of empire left the Venetians with little to account for, so they turned their energies to leisure. This too was a new invention, requiring a very different organization of life from that imposed by agriculture and commerce. The new nobility, in fact, defined itself by its leisure, creating a demand for goods with no utilitarian purpose. *'Venice's most wonderful invention'*, Mary McCarthy writes,

*' — that of the easel-painting — was designed solely for pleasure. Painting, up to Giorgione, had a utility basis: the glorification of God and the saints, the glorification of the state (in the pageant picture), the glorification of an individual*



*(the portrait). Giorgione was the first to create canvases that had no purpose beyond sheer enjoyment, the production of agreeable moods, as Berenson puts it. They were canvases for the private gentleman, for the house, both new conceptions that rested on a new premise: the existence of leisure.'*

In this too Venice proved prescient: What was once the preoccupation of the few became the mass tourism of the many — Venice now draws 20 million visitors per year. Undaunted by crowds and high prices, they stream in, though rarely venturing outside San Marco and the Rialto. This leaves the Dorsoduro and San Croce surprisingly empty, where unexpected treasures may nevertheless be found at nearly every *vaporetto* stop. At Ca' D'oro, for example, only one stop from the Rialto, the little Franchetti museum is a gem; even the tiles in the entrance-way are a delight.



In Venice, such discoveries seem inexhaustible. One returns, regardless of the congestion, for these, and because no two *vaporetto* rides are the same, and the maze of streets assures even residents that they can follow a different path to their destinations every day. And the light, changing from brilliant sunlight to mist-filtered diffusion to ghostly twilight and back again, presents an ever-changing aspect. There is nothing else like it in the world.



*Blue Lagoon, photogravure etching by Peter Miller*



#### 4. Other Cities With Canals



foot traffic, but most are traversed by cars and trucks, which diminishes any comparison with Venice. The main avenue, Nevsky Prospekt, is not near a canal, and the larger canals do not have that both-sides-of-the-water ambience that gives Venice its intimacy. But St Petersburg has a magnificent night skyline, a world-class museum (the Hermitage), a church (the Resurrection) that is as elaborately ornamented as any in Christendom, and has certainly fulfilled the ambition of its

And yet other cities have been described as 'another Venice', which almost always proves to be misleading. Saint Petersburg, Russia, has been described as 'the Venice of the North'. Peter the Great may even have had Venice, as well as Paris, in mind when designing the city in 1703 which he hoped would rival those European capitals. Like Venice, it is built at an estuary on the banks of numerous islands, and has a great many bridges (539). A few of them, like this one with gryphons, are on a scale suitable for



founder to be a great cultural and maritime center. Not another Venice though.



Livorno, Italy has a district called 'Venezia' with canals designed by Venetian architects, and the unusual octagonal-shaped Church of Santa Caterina. But neither the canals nor the churches have Venice's wealth of Byzantine ornament. Livorno's harbor has more the aspect of a fort — the Fortezza Livorno— than a pleasure-

palatial entry into a magical kingdom like that of Venice. But Livorno has a down-at-heels indifference to tourist traffic that is a welcome relief from more popular cities, like Venice or Pisa. Hammer-and-sickle graffiti co-exist with the best-stocked U.S. Army-surplus store in Christendom, the Mercantino Americano. It was at Livorno that the Medici defeated the Mediterranean pirates in the 17th century, and it was from Livorno that Garibaldi launched his *'Expedition of One Thousand'* to liberate Sicily and unify northern and southern Italy. A free port with a glorious maritime history, but another Venice — no.



Amsterdam too has been described as another Venice. It has graceful canals which still serve as active waterways, and the bridges across them are of a scale that invites walking. But the Dutch are too neat and orderly for their city to be considered Venetian. The canals form semi-circular loops, like ring roads, around a central core — very efficient and easy to navigate, but lacking the chaos of walking through a maze of alleys in Venice and winding up at a *ca'* with no bridge. If one could imagine Venice as a clean well-organized quiet place (I can't), then the peripheral canals of Amsterdam might be that place. But Venice without its chaos, its absurdist touches like traffic lights on waterways, its vibrant commerce, its proud decrepitude like that of an aged dowager countess, its Byzantine splendor, would not be Venice.



Then there's the '*Venice of the East*', Suzhou, China, depicted in numerous websites. Venice was founded in the fifth century, and Suzhou's founding occurred sometime between a millennium previously or two hundred years later (that being the range of various sources). It was well-established when Venetian explorer Marco Polo described Suzhou in 1276 as a land of '*six thousand bridges, clever merchants, cunning men of all crafts, very wise men called Sages and great natural physicians.*' The two cities are comparable in their mingling of maritime and terrestrial life, and in their merchant class which developed the *entrepot* possibilities of their locations. Both cities grew rich on trade and became centers of inland and maritime empires. Now only about 200 bridges remain, but like Venice's they are mostly suitable for walking. Suzhou may be the closest thing to '*another Venice*', or Venice to '*another Suzhou*'. They are official sister cities.

Even more than its fabulous sunsets, than the ethereal light of of a thousand reflections in its canals, than its graceful domes, hidden byways, and arched bridges, it is the chaotic lively unexpected Venice that endears itself to artists and





visionaries.

## Renewal

Peter Daniel Miller

Spring is the time for all creatures to crawl out of their burrows and renew their lives. I travel to the southernmost point of the four main islands of Japan, Ibusuki at the southern tip of Kyushu, to get an early taste of spring. At Ibusuki this begins with my immersion in the hot-spring sands at the edge of the sea.

Preparing for my burial, I lie down on the beach. As an attendant shovels sand onto me, I think of the Kobo Abe / Teshigahara film *Woman in the Dunes* where a visitor stumbles into a sandpit and is trapped with the beautiful young widow who lives there.

The sand is unexpectedly weighty, and even though I COULD get up anytime, I don't really want to. As a comforting warmth envelops me, I feel my heartbeat, and every whoosh and push of my arteries, as never before. Far from being a burial, this is a rejuvenation! Steam rises from the beach, as heat from the earth's molten core percolates just beneath. Here in Ibusuki, I am in touch with the deepest forces of earth and cosmos.



In the volcanic soil created by an ancient explosion of Kaimon-dake, and warmed by the sun above and the earth below, grow *soramame* — ‘sky-beans’. Sweet to eat right out of the pod, and very fine roasted as well, they grow here year-round. Dinner at the minshuku, Unagi Kohan (tel 0993-34-1954), steamed over a hot-spring vent, is superb. The family have lived there all their lives. Hot-spring vents supply all their energy requirements, and nearly everything they need is available

locally. Geothermal energy supplies a lot of the electricity in the region.

Back in Ibusuki, I visit Sakai Shoten (tel 0993-34-0070), a factory that turns *katsuo*, a smaller version of tuna, into various forms that are a staple of the Japanese diet. In one form, it is solid, preserved after steaming and drying with repeated applications of a special fungus, then sun-dried. The work proceeds with astonishing efficiency and speed, and artistry as well. Whether fresh or dried, the shape is very important for the supremely exacting tastes of Japanese consumers. Sakai-san explains there is an inherent love of beauty, even (or especially) with food. He demonstrates how the shopper's hand inevitably gravitates to the more appealingly-shaped fish, and this is reflected in its price — the difference between profit and loss for his company. The dried version, expertly carved, reveals a pine tree, a bamboo leaf, and a plum-flower, the traditional *shochikubai*, symbols of long life. A pair, masculine and feminine, is traditionally given as a wedding gift.

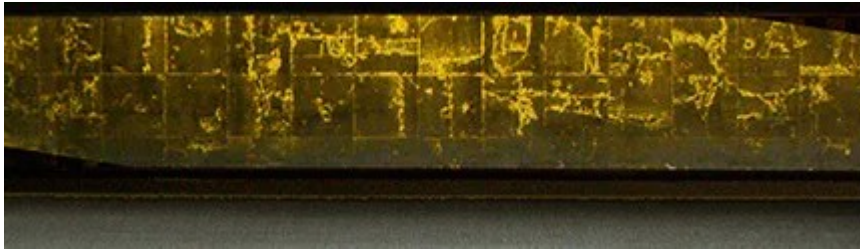


The solid *katsuobushi* can be shaved into very thin pieces with a box-plane. These are used to flavor rice, misoshiru, vegetables, and other foods. The number of steps, the immense amount of work, and the sheer artistry required to put this on everyone's table is mind-boggling. In addition to everything else, to meet new food-safety standards, the factory must tag every fish with the date it was caught and the name of the fishing boat.

The wealth of historical experience wrapped up in seemingly simple *katsuobushi* is a real revelation to me. I feel a kinship with my own etching, minimalist, black-and-white images that emerge from the simple materials of ink, paper, and copper. After gazing at a field of *nanohana* flowers, with Kaimon-dake in the distance, I return to my workshop newly inspired, and happy to have experienced the warmth of Ibusuku and its people.

## In Praise of Shadows □ □□□

Junichiro Tanizaki's 1933 essay *In Praise of Shadows* (影の礼賛) draws our attention to the very different nature of visual experience in an age before electric lights were widespread. Japanese dwellings, alcoves, ink-drawings, and interior spaces framed by tatami mats and shoji panels are best seen in the low light that was once customary. The dark lustre of lacquerware and yokan (a Japanese confection) looming out of a dark background create an appealing presence and warmth. And the stray reflections picked up by gold leaf convey the wonder of that precious metal as if its luminescence came from itself.



Flooded by bright lights, all these surroundings and objects become garish. Granting that such illumination has its uses, Tanizaki nevertheless notes that Japanese aesthetics developed from the conditions of daily life, where awareness and appreciation of shadows originated.

The plague of excessive illumination has only intensified since *In Praise of Shadows* was written. Street lights, neon signs, outdoor jumbo-telescreens, office towers have banished all trace of darkness from big cities. The cities themselves are linked by continuous chains of light. These show up clearly in satellite photos of the earth, where the relative brightness is taken for an index of civilization. Big-city residents on rare journeys to dark country are mystified by our galaxy the Milky Way, a sight so seldom seen they hardly know what it is. Fireflies shun brightly-lit areas, which render their own light-displays invisible to prospective mates. They too are best appreciated in darkness.

Here are some excerpts from Tanizaki's 'In Praise of Shadows':

*'A light room would no doubt have been more convenient for us, too, than a dark room. The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends. And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows — it has nothing else.... The light from the garden steals in but dimly through paper-paneled doors, and it is precisely this indirect light that makes for us the charm of a room.'*

*'We do our walls in neutral colors so that the sad, fragile, dying rays can sink into absolute repose.... We delight in the mere sight of the delicate glow of fading rays clinging to the surface of a dusky wall, there to live out what little life remains to them. We never tire of the sight, for to us this pale glow and these dim shadows far surpass any ornament. And so, as we must if we are not to disturb the glow, we*

*finish the walls with sand in a single neutral color.*

*'Of course the Japanese room does have its picture alcove, and in it a hanging scroll and a flower arrangement. But the scroll and the flowers serve not as ornament but rather to give depth to the shadows.... A Japanese room might be likened to an inkwash painting, the paper-paneled shoji being the expanse where the ink is thinnest, and the alcove where it is darkest.... An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light drawn into it forms dim shadows within emptiness.*



*'And yet, when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway.... This was the genius of our ancestors, that by cutting off the light from the empty space they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth superior to that of any wall painting or*

*ornament.*

Beyond The Pale Glow, photogravure etching

*'Surely you have seen how the gold leaf of a sliding door or screen will pick up a distant glimmer from the garden, then suddenly send forth an ethereal glow, a faint golden light cast upon the enveloping darkness, like the glow upon the horizon at sunset. In no other setting is gold quite so exquisitely beautiful. You walk past, turning to look again, and yet again, and as you move away the gold surface of the paper flows even more deeply, changing not in a flash, but growing slowly, steadily brighter...*

*'And above all there is rice. A glistening black lacquer rice cask set off in a dark corner is both beautiful to behold and a powerful stimulus to the appetite. Then the lid is briskly lifted, and this pure white freshly boiled food, heaped in its black container, each and every grain gleaming like a pearl, sends forth billows of warm steam — here is a sight no Japanese can fail to be moved by. Our cooking depends upon shadows and is inseparable from darkness....*



*'And I realized then that only in dim half-light is the true beauty of Japanese lacquerware revealed....But in the the still dimmer light of the candle-stand, as I gazed at the trays and bowls standing in the shadows cast by that flickering point of flame, I discovered in the gloss of this lacquerware a depth and richness like that of a still, dark pond, a beauty that I had not before seen.'*



- Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, tr Thomas J Harper and Edward G Seidensticker (Sedgwick, Maine, USA: Leete's Island Books, 1977; *'In'ei' Reisan'*, Japanese text originally published in Keizai Orai, 1933 - 34).

## A Case of Mistaken Identity

Peter Daniel Miller

### *The perils of faulty scholarship*

Scene: A gathering of the Moscow elite — oligarchs, actresses, writers, artists, a soupçon of French and Italian aristocrats. Fine wine flowed freely, like the *décolletages* of the ladies disrobed of their endangered-species furs. Political scandals and international affairs having been exhausted, the talk turned naturally to the Old Days. 'I just adore *medieval seals*', one of the most gorgeous paragons of Russian cinema let slip in a moment of inebriated abandon. 'Particularly the *double-eagle Sarwerden* — fierce and gentle, soaring and grounded, at the same time', she went on, as the guests abandoned their own lines of enquiry and tuned in, ineluctably drawn to the stunningly shapely woman's surprisingly erudite repartee.



'The Sarwerden is so simple, yet so much more elegant than the later Baroque versions,' she said as she turned effusively in my direction, her *Hermes 24 Faubourg* wafting toward my nostrils and mingling with the scents of cognac and brandy. 'Don't you think so?' And suddenly, her mischievous eyes, eyes that had transfixed every man within sight of them, turned to me imploringly as if seeking a cue to help her recall some lost lines, and declared, 'You're an artist! What exactly was the year of the Sarwerden double-eagle seal?' '1145', I said unhesitatingly, as if I were completely attuned to Larisa's (for that was her name) infatuation with medieval seals. The look of relief that came over her face at this revelation was palpable. It expressed the completion of her most secret desires, and an instant command of History that excited the envy of everyone in the room (and beyond — word of such matters travels fast). And given the presence of several whose families could themselves easily be traced to that very date, this was no small feat.

Hardly had she had a chance to express her fondest gratitude to me than one of the menials pouring the drinks breathed a stage whisper intimating 'Sorry, Guv'nor, it was 1185 — see here, this Byzantine style didn't make it to Europe until



well after the middle of the 12th century'. Larisa instantly turned her lovely back to me, as did everyone else, which was not easy to do, as they were all dispersed throughout a very large set of rooms. But so intense was their disgust at what struck all and sundry as a sort of fraud on my part, that it was as if I, theretofore an honoured guest, had suddenly become a non-person.

A silent parting opened up, with that exaggerated politeness that European aristocrats and Russian arrivistes use to express their uttermost contempt, enabling me to exit the scene without further embarrassment. And so, beset by a shame deeper than that of Raskolnikov after he took an ax to a defenseless old woman, I walked out into the cold Moscow night, my worn-out overcoat pitifully impotent against the icy wind coming off the Moscow River. I stared at the river below, which seemed to beckon me into its cold embrace, a vision of Larisa appearing just beneath its wavy surface...